

17th Sunday after Pentecost
September 27, 2020
Cross of Glory Lutheran Church
Brooklyn Center, MN

PRELUDE

WELCOME

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God, who creates, redeems, and sustains us and all of creation. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Faithful God, **have mercy on us. We confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We turn from your loving embrace and go our own ways. We judge others before examining ourselves. We place our own needs before the needs of our neighbors. Humble us, have mercy on us, and turn us again to life in you; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.**

God hears the cries of all who call out in need, and through his death and resurrection, Christ has made us his own. Hear the truth that God proclaims: Your sins are forgiven in the name of † Jesus Christ. Led by the Holy Spirit, live in freedom and newness to do God's work in the world. **Amen.**

GATHERING HYMN #642 Ubi Caritas

Ubi caritas et amor,
ubi caritas, Deus ibi est. *(Repeated)*

GREETING

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

KYRIE

In peace, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace from above, and for our salvation, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God, and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For this holy house, and for all who offer here their worship and praise, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord. **Amen, amen.**

HYMN OF PRAISE

Refrain: This is the feast of victory for our God. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, whose blood set us free to be people of God. Power and riches, wisdom and strength, and honor and blessing and glory are his. *Refrain*

Sing with all the people of God, and join in the hymn of all creation: Blessing and honor, glory and might be to God and the Lamb forever. Amen. *Refrain*

For the Lamb who was slain has begun his reign. Alleluia. *Refrain*

PRAYER OF THE DAY The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Let us pray . . . **Almighty Father, your Son humbled himself to the point of death on a cross. Grant us a spirit of humility, and energize us with your love, so that we might put our neighbors' needs before our own; through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord, Amen .**

READING: Philippians 2:1-13

¹If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ²make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. ¹²Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SPECIAL MUSIC

Keith Williams

GOSPEL: Matthew 21:23-32

The holy gospel according to St. Matthew. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

²³When [Jesus] entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" ²⁴Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the

answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. ²⁵Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' ²⁶But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet." ²⁷So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

²⁸"What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' ²⁹He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. ³⁰The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. ³¹Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³²For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him."

The gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

SERMON **Pastor Ali Tranvik**

This past week, a man named Robert Graetz died. His obituary was in the New York Times, although he was not very well known. He was a Lutheran pastor and a powerful force in the Civil Rights Movement. I only know bits and pieces of his story, but I think I can say for certain: Graetz was a deeply humble and modest man.

Graetz spent some of his youth in Ohio, so perhaps he was shaped by a kind of Midwestern modesty (although, I'm still not sure Ohio counts as the "Midwest." I argued about this with people for six years in NC and still don't know, but I digress).

As fellow Midwesterners, we're likely familiar with this cultural value of modesty. Many of us were raised on a kind of Midwestern modesty. We don't want to be too loud or boastful. We are probably more apt to say "who, me?" than "look at me." We're taught that it's better to "go along to get along," to bite our tongues rather than to make a fuss. We tend to play ourselves down. (I'm painting with broad brushstrokes here but you get the idea...)

And in a world where people seem to constantly be trying to play themselves up—whether it be particular politicians on the campaign trail or particular friends on Facebook—modesty is a refreshing (and needed) quality.

But today I want to suggest that the world doesn't just need a bit more modesty, but that we also need humility. And while they're related, Paul's letter to Philippians tells us that they're not quite the same thing. Here's how Paul defines humility: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in *humility* regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others" (Phil 2:3-4). Paul defines humility, in other words, as putting the interests and needs of others before your own. And then he points to Jesus as the embodiment of this kind of humility, as the one who emptied himself, the one who humbled himself, the one who was obedient to the point of death on a cross (Phil 2:7-8).

And it's when we start looking at Jesus' life that we begin to see what Paul means by humility is something a bit different than Midwestern modesty. Because as it turns out, this Jesus wasn't really known for biting his tongue. He wasn't too concerned about making a fuss. We see an example of this in the story that immediately precedes today's Gospel reading from Matthew, when Jesus made quite a fuss and flipped the tables in the temple, driving out the money changers and causing the religious leaders to question his authority. Yes, he was obedient to God, but obedience to God caused him to be disobedient to the powers and principalities that were oppressing the poor and dispossessed. Taking a look at Jesus' life reveals not a "going along to get along" kind of humility, but an often disruptive and dissenting humility. A kind of humility that ended in death on a cross *because of the way* that Jesus put others' interests and needs before his own...

Let's return to the story of Robert Graetz, the Lutheran pastor I mentioned earlier. Because as I said, I think Graetz shows us what humility looks like. Graetz grew up during the time of the Great Depression. He grew up during the time of WWII. And he also grew up during the time of Jim Crow, a set of laws and policies that mandated racial segregation, and instilled a sense of fear in white folks about their black neighbors. So Graetz, like any other white child in America at the time, attended all-white schools in his childhood hometown in WV. Reflecting back on those early years, Graetz later wrote in his memoir: "There were black people around but my own real contacts were with janitors and others in menial positions. Helen, our cleaning woman, was the [black person] I knew best. Otherwise, black [folks] had no significance for me...they were often the butt of jokes and not considered people of value."

Graetz went on to attend Capital University in Ohio, followed by seminary, where he was ordained as a Lutheran pastor. In 1955, when Graetz was just 28 years old, he and his wife Jeannie accepted a call to move to Montgomery, AL, where he was called to serve as the pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, an all-black congregation, just as the Civil Rights Movement began to take root.

As Graetz and wife packed their bags for Montgomery, Graetz was contacted by his Lutheran superiors with a warning: "don't rock the boat." They made him promise "not to start trouble." He did promise not to *start* trouble. But just months into his new ministry in Montgomery, Graetz says he *got caught up in* the trouble that was already underway. You see, one of Graetz's neighbors, a woman who often led NAACP meetings at his church, a woman by the name of Rosa Parks, had recently been arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus. Her arrest led to the Montgomery Bus Boycott, an effort that sought to dissent the desegregation of public transportation that had been written into law. But Graetz knew that to be obedient to God meant to disobey the law of the state that discriminated against his black brothers and sisters. So on Sundays, he would urge parishioners in his sermons not to board Montgomery's buses, and during the rest of the week, he spent much of ministry giving black neighbors rides to and from work. Though it was planned as a one-day event, the bus boycott lasted over 500 days before city authorities finally gave in. Despite threats from the local Ku Klux Klan, intimidation from city authorities, and isolation from fellow white colleagues, Graetz was the only white pastor in Montgomery to support the boycott, remaining an unbowed advocate for desegregation. Graetz shares that during that time, his home (where he lived with his wife Jeannie and his young children) was bombed—twice. But Graetz said: "The absence of fear is not the point. We often had good reason to be afraid. What you *do* when you are afraid is what makes the difference."

Graetz's story is an important one for our troubling times. And it's one that is not very well known. As his recent obituary claims, "Mr. Graetz never gained the international prominence of his friend, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., nor the through-the-ages symbolism of his neighbor, Rosa Parks." Why? We might say Graetz was a modest guy. He didn't promote himself. But he was also humble, and humility—the act of putting others' needs before our own—is never going to be very popular. Graetz shows us that humility isn't merely about playing ourselves down. He shows us that humility not about *us* period. He shows us that humility is about putting the interests and needs of *others* before our own—regardless of the cost or the consequences.

And for me, as someone who thinks of herself as a modest Midwesterner, he uncomfortably shows me that as a person of faith, I can't always "go along to get along." That some circumstances call for speaking out instead of biting my tongue. That some situations require that I make a fuss. That if my quietness becomes quiet *ism*, if my Midwestern modesty becomes *passivity*, then I've missed what humility is all about. "What you *do* when you are afraid is what makes the difference," says Graetz.

Now, it is tempting to make Graetz into a kind of super-human figure. I am tempted to call him a "hero," because what that allows me to do is to distance myself from him, to say "he's in a different category," my obituary is not going to be in the NYT. Making Graetz into a "hero" allows me to get myself off the hook for my own passivity.

But Graetz, ever humble, would be the first to reject heroism. He didn't possess extraordinary gifts or talents. He didn't have other-worldly courage. He was a sinner. And he was afraid. But he was humble because he recognized that God had a use for him. In his memoir, Graetz wrote, "Plenty of people around us, Negro and white, reinforced our conviction that the fabric not only needed to be changed but to be torn apart. And they were willing to stand with us as we allowed God to use us in that process. Even in the worst of times we knew we were never alone. God was always present." *We allowed God to use us in that process. God was always present.*

Our passage in Philippians puts it like this: "It is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work" (Phil 2:12-13). Now, when it says "it's God who is at work in you," the Greek verb used here for "work" is *energeo*, which can also be translated as energy. So we could read that last line as "It is God who gives you energy for your work." It is God who energizes you. It is God who equips you to walk humbly.

Graetz was a regular person, just like you or like me, who was energized by God for the work that needed to be done. It was not "charity" or "volunteerism" or a "service project." It was not work that glamorous or well-compensated. It was the unglamorous and costly work of humility, of putting others' interests before his own. It was the work of being a person of faith in a world of need.

What does humility look like for us today? If for one Lutheran in the 1950s in Montgomery, it meant denouncing the demagogues in power who denigrated black folks and blamed "outsiders" for stirring up trouble where there allegedly was none, perhaps for us Lutherans in 2020 in Minnesota it means denouncing the demagogue in power who is denigrating refugees and blaming these "outsiders" for stirring up trouble where there allegedly is none. We saw example of this just last week in Bemidji, when President Trump told an almost all white audience that they have "good genes," while warning them that if Joe Biden is elected, Minnesota would be filled with refugees from "dangerous countries" and would become "overrun and destroyed." If for Graetz humility meant confronting the injustice of Jim Crow face to face, maybe for us it means confronting the injustice of xenophobia and nationalism face to face. Maybe it means looking to the interests of our neighbors at CAPI, the organization across the street that works to support refugees right here in the Brooklyn Center community. Maybe it means starting pen pal relationships with migrants and refugees who are living in ICE detention centers in the Sherburne, Freeborn, Carver county jails. Maybe it means discerning ways that Cross of Glory, all of us within it, can be living sanctuaries for our neighbors seeking refuge.

To be clear, humility is not red or blue. It does not take the side of any one political party. Indeed, it seems unlikely that a genuinely humble candidate could ever win an election; the kind of humility Paul is talking about here is never going to be popular. But as Christians who claim Christ as our Lord, we are humility does call us across politics and parties to first consider the needs of the dispossessed and the displaced, the sick and the suffering, the orphan and the widow, the hungry and the naked, the unsheltered and the prisoner, the foreigner and the refugee. Christian humility—embodied in Jesus Christ, who was a refugee, after all—demands that we consider the needs of those seeking refuge.

So I don't know exactly what humility look like for us, but I do know that in a state of refugees, in a city of refugees, in a church of refugees (some first generation, and some, like myself, just a few generations back), there is no shortage of opportunities to practice Christian humility, no shortage of neighbors whose needs and interests we are called to consider.

The call is daunting. And the cost may be high. But take courage, dear friends. As Graetz says, "God is always present." Or as Paul says, "It is God who is at work in us," already energizing us for the work ahead. Thanks be to God! Amen.

Sources:

- Alan Blinder, "Robert S. Graetz, Rare White Minister to Back Bus Boycott, Dies at 92," *The New York Times* (Sept 20, 2020).
- Graetz, Robert. *A White Preacher's Memoir: The Montgomery Bus Boycott* (Montgomery: Black Belt Press, 1998).

- Hannah Olson, "Trump delivers sprawling speech to thousands at Bemidji rally," *Duluth News Tribune*, Sept 18, 2020.
- Maya Rou, "Trump's 'good genes' comment at Bemidji rally draws condemnation," *The Star Tribune*, Sept 21, 2020.
- Susan Eastman, "Commentary on Philippians 2:1-13," *Working Preacher*, Sept 25, 2011.

HYMN OF THE DAY #712 Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service

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| <p>1 Lord, whose love in humble service bore the weight of human need, who upon the cross, forsaken, worked your mercy's perfect deed: we, your servants, bring the worship not of voice alone, but heart; consecrating to your purpose ev'ry gift which you impart.</p> | <p>2 Still your children wander homeless; still the hungry cry for bread; still the captives long for freedom; still in grief we mourn our dead. As you, Lord, in deep compassion healed the sick and freed the soul, by your Spirit send your power to our world to make it whole.</p> |
| <p>3 As we worship, grant us vision, till your love's revealing light in its height and depth and greatness dawns upon our quickened sight, making known the needs and burdens your compassion bids us bear, stirring us to ardent service, your abundant life to share.</p> | <p>4 Called by worship to your service, forth in your dear name we go, to the child, the youth, the aged, love in living deeds to show; hope and health, good will and comfort, counsel, aid and peace we give, that your servants, Lord, in freedom may your mercy know and live.</p> |

CONFESSION OF FAITH Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

OFFERTORY

At this time, we invite you to prepare your offering. You may send a check to the church (5929 Brooklyn Blvd, Brooklyn Center, MN 55429), or contact Sue in the office to learn more about how to set up automatic, online giving. Thank you for the ways you continue to generously support the work of Cross of Glory!

OFFERTORY RESPONSE You Are the One

You're the One Who made the heavens
 You're the One Who shaped the earth
 You're the One who formed my heart
 Long before my birth
 I believe You'll always lead me
 All my days have been ordained
 All Your thoughts toward me are holy
 Full of love and grace

(Lord) You are the One You are holy
 You are the One You are worthy
 You are the One You are the One everlasting
 You are the One I will worship
 You are the One I will serve all my days
 You are the One You are the One everlasting

You are the One	You are the One
Jesus You're the One	You are the One

OFFERING PRAYER

Blessed are you, O God, maker of all things. You have given us these gifts of your good creation. Nourish us with the daily bread you provide, and send us forth to set tables in the midst of a hungry world, through Jesus Christ, the bread of life. Amen.

PRAYERS of the PEOPLE

As we consider the needs and the interests of others, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need... Gracious God,

We pray for humility. Grant us humility that's not passive but active, that's not self-interested but other-oriented, that does not prioritize our own needs but asks first what is needed of us. And we give you thanks that it is you, O God, who works in us and who fills us with energy for the work ahead. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for creation. We give you thanks for the changing seasons, for the gifts the earth has given us in this time of harvest, and for the laborers who work the land. We pray for those affected by natural disasters--for those whose lives have been impacted by the wildfires on the west coast and by the hurricane on the gulf coast. Be present with those who are suffering. And energize us all for the work of caring for your creation and all life within it. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all peoples seeking refuge. For those fleeing war and violence, for those separated from family, for those with unstable shelter, for those displaced or dispossessed. Equip us all to be living, moving sanctuaries--that our walls, our arms, and our hearts might extend to our all those seeking home. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our political life. Guide us as we head into this election season. Where differences seek to separate, unite us. Where hatred seeks to blind us, empower us to see your image in all our neighbors. And where worldly powers compete for authority, empower us to trust in the authority of your love. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the life of the church. We give you thanks for the people of Cross of Glory, and for the gift of community that still finds a way in these lonely and difficult days. We pray especially for Bev Hoium, Gil Hartlage, Terry Stejskal, and the family of Carol Sjoquist, and all others who are in need of our loving care. We also pray for our neighboring faith communities--for Faith Healing, for the Wildfire congregations, for our neighbors at Iman Husain Islamic Center, for our Jewish neighbors as they celebrate Yom Kippur, and for all communities of faith here in Brooklyn Center. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God, because you became like us, we pray that we might become more like you; in the name of the humbled and exalted one, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER

Gathered together as one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray the prayer Jesus taught us...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

BLESSING

Mothering God, Father, + Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you and lead you into life. **Amen.**

SENDING FORTH SONG I Will Boast in the Lord My God

Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom
Or the strong man boast in his strength
Let not the rich man boast in his riches
But let the humble come and give thanks
To the One Who made us
The One Who saved us

I will boast in the Lord my God
I will boast in the One Who's worthy
I will boast in the Lord my God
I will boast in the One Who's worthy
(He's worthy)

I will make my boast in Christ alone (6X)

He's worthy He's worthy

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Love your neighbor.
Thanks be to God.

The Order of Service is from Evangelical Lutheran Worship which is commended for use in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

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Community Announcements

- Following the Zoom worship service, you're invited to Virtual Coffee Hour, an opportunity to connect with one another for a brief time of small-group fellowship. Friends, family, and first-timers are warmly welcome!
- Join us for Bible Study on Tuesday mornings at 9:30 am on Zoom as we explore the texts for the upcoming week.
- Lend a hand with food distribution and meet some new neighbors at CAPI's Fresh Food Friday on 10/9. Email Pastor Ali for more information.
- The Cross of Glory softball team plays its last game of the season on 10/5 at 6:20 pm at the north field of Centennial Park. Join us for some outdoor, physically-distanced fellowship!
- To read the obituary of Robert Graetz, whose story was told in today's sermon, visit nytimes.com/2020/09/20/obituaries/Robert-graetz-dead.html
- An orientation for all those interested in tutoring/mentoring a student at Progeny Academy is scheduled for next week. Please email Pastor Ali if you're interested in taking part or learning more.
- Please contact Pastor Ali with any other announcements or pastoral concerns and needs. You can reach her by email (atranvik@crossofglory.us) or phone (763-533-8602).